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E U R O F O R U M

The Democratic Legitimacy of the EU and Support for Redistribution within Europe

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we investigate public support for redistribution policy schemes at the European level, which are at the heart of a proposal for a European Social Union. We depart from a welfare regime hypothesis, suggesting that current welfare state arrangements have a strong impact on public opinion. Given the clear differences between member states, this would suggest that reaching a consensus across European societies will not be a straightforward process. First, we investigate whether a shared European citizenship can be used as a foundation for a Social Union. We do find a negative relation, however, between European identity and support for redistribution at the EU level. Individual mechanisms of solidarity and insurance are therefore unlikely candidates as a foundation for reciprocity within Europe. We do find, however, a positive relation between trust in the EU institutions and support for redistribution at the European level. This suggests that attitudes toward the institutions can determine the public legitimacy of policies implemented by these institutions, as the institutions are being held responsible for the sustainability of the common good of a prosperous and cohesive European Union. A tentative conclusion therefore could be that a European Social Union should not be based on interpersonal solidarity, but rather on trustworthy institutions, governing a common good for all Europeans.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The economic and financial crisis that has hit the global economy from 2008 on has had severe destabilizing consequences for the European Union. On the one hand, various political parties and organizations questioned the legitimacy of the Union, and this wave of Euroscepticism also had a strong impact on the results of the elections for the European Parliament that were held in May 2014. On the other hand, and in complete contrast to this Eurosceptic point of view, is the strongly emerging vision that further European integration is required (Habermas, 2011). Various pathways have been suggested for this further integration. First, the common currency within the Eurozone requires a further integration of economic, budgetary and fiscal policies (De Grauwe & Ji, 2013). Second, it has been argued that a stronger political integration of the European member states is only possible and legitimate if the notion of a common European citizenship is being strengthened (Fligstein, Polyakova & Sandholtz, 2012; Grimonprez, 2014; Verhaegen, Hooghe & Quintelier, 2014). Third, and finally, it has been suggested that a stronger European Social Union is necessary if the goal is to address the strong discrepancies with regard to the economic and social performance of the various member states of the Union (Vandenbroucke, 2013).

In this paper, our goal is to assess the feasibility and legitimacy of such proposals for a European Social Union. The level of legitimacy depends on two fundamental characteristics. First, there should be support for redistribution as such (Dallinger, 2010). If European citizens have the idea that current levels of inequality are sustainable and do not pose a moral, social or economic problem, almost self-evidently there would be no further social support for policies of redistribution, no matter what level of redistribution is envisioned. Second, even if there is democratic support for redistribution, citizens still need to identify the European Union as the adequate level to implement this policy. A preference for policies of redistribution at the national, or even at the subnational level, might even prevent the European Union from developing into a truly European Social Union, as is envisioned. This second concern finds its origin in the fact that previous studies have shown that various forms of diversity (linguistic, ethnic or religious) might have a negative effect on the willingness to invest in redistribution (Dahlberg, Edmark & Lundqvist, 2012). To a large extent, solidarity mechanisms imply a boundary between the 'insiders' who are allowed access and the 'outsiders' who do not receive the advantages associated with the solidarity scheme.

2. LITERATURE

There is a huge variation both between individuals and between societies with regard to support for redistribution and income inequality. While some societies are inclined to accept rather high levels of inequality, this is not the case for others. At the state level, it has been claimed that existing political rules and institutions determine political support for redistribution. Welfare state regimes create expectations and beliefs among the population that will continue to shape their preferences toward future policies and their attitudes toward those that are to benefit from redistribution efforts (Jæger, 2006). Building on the distinction between various welfare state regimes that has been introduced by Esping-Andersen (1990), the reasoning in this line of the literature is that citizens' concepts of fairness and equality are being shaped by their institutional setting, which would also imply a large degree of institutionally-shaped path dependency, as this congruence

between welfare regimes and popular beliefs in the long run might lead to a continuation of existing policies (Jæger, 2009). Experiences with welfare regimes thus determine public opinion, which by itself functions as a barrier against change in the nature of welfare regimes and redistribution policies (Brooks & Manza, 2007). Especially in countries with a long tradition in welfare regimes, this regime hypothesis clearly explains differences in public opinion toward redistribution (Larsen, 2008; Jakobsen, 2011).

On the individual level, it has been argued that support for redistribution policies to some extent depends on forms of enlightened self-interest and risk-aversion. Even actors who currently have high levels of economic resources, can still calculate the odds that at some moment in their life, they too will be confronted with an economic downturn, which will force them to rely on forms of social security and redistribution (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2005). The reverse phenomenon has also been documented: if those who have low levels of economic resources have the idea that they can realize upward social mobility based on their own merits and labour efforts, these groups are less likely to support forms of redistribution (Benanbou & Ok, 2001). Basically, it is argued in this approach that citizens follow an insurance logic: their support for policies of redistribution is partly based on their assessment that, at a given point in time, they too might profit from this policy. This assessment of course can be wrongly informed or erroneous, but this will not make a difference with regard to the way they formulate their preferences. Self-evidently, support for redistribution can also be based on feelings of solidarity or a rational insight into need for sustainable social cohesion (Van Parijs, 2000). In that case, the benefits that the individual will receive in the long run are far less tangible, and their common goods character might even lead to free rider behaviour. This does lead to the suggestion, however, that social integration is not necessarily based only on interpersonal solidarity, but can also be founded on the preference for a more cohesive society, also at the European level.

Empirical research suggests that it will be difficult to achieve a high level of solidarity if cultural distances within a society are perceived to be rather large (Bay & Pedersen, 2006). These distances can be based on ethnicity, religion or language. This approach toward support for redistribution has important consequences for the scope of redistributive policies. Rational actors will have a preference to limit redistribution efforts to a specific in-group, with the expectation that the members of that in-group will practise some form of generalized reciprocity. In fact, some studies have shown that because of this mechanism, immigration and ethnic diversity might have a detrimental effect on the willingness to support redistribution policies. As it is assumed that part of the immigrant population will be dependent on social security benefits, the incentives for natives to invest in redistribution schemes are expected to be reduced (Larsen, 2011; Mau & Burkhardt, 2009). The willingness to support redistribution among members of out-groups is in general more limited, because in that case the odds that in some way or another a form of reciprocity will occur are much more limited (Hooghe et al., 2009). Historically it can indeed be observed that most current systems of redistribution found their origin within the framework of the nation-state, and this automatically installs a boundary with regard to who can be involved in this redistribution scheme (Banting & Kymlicka, 2006). As Kymlicka (2001, 226) argues:

“there must be some sense of common identity and common membership uniting donor and recipient, such that sacrifices being made for anonymous others are still, in some sense,

sacrifices for 'one of us'. Also, there must be a high level of trust that sacrifices will be reciprocated: i.e. that if one makes sacrifices for the needy today, that one's own needs will be taken care of later”.

The expectation of reciprocity therefore is not specifically tied to an individual or a group of individuals but rather to a general expectation that the system as such will take care for a generalized reciprocity. It is therefore not necessary to expect that the specific individual that now receives a benefit will also compensate this by contributing oneself at a fixed time in the future. The principle of *generalized reciprocity* means that there is a reasonable expectation that, somewhere in the future, one will be able to rely on reciprocity, no matter who is expected to contribute for that at a certain moment of time. It is important to note here that this expectation of generalized reciprocity does not necessarily depend on an assessment of the trustworthiness of individual others within the exchange network. Governing institutional norms, or the impact of state institutions that can function as a third party enforcer, might be equally effective in this regard (Barta et al., 2011).

While in the past national social security systems mainly played this role, it remains to be investigated whether institutions at different policy levels might be equally effective in this regard. An alternative reading to these findings is that moral norms do play an important role in the willingness to invest in redistribution schemes (Bowles & Gintis, 2000). In that case, too, however, previous research indicates that the set of norms actors use might vary considerably between countries, partly as a result of past experiences with currently existing social security schemes.

The finding that there are substantive differences between countries and existing welfare state regimes would imply that it is not evident to change the scope of welfare regimes (Kulin & Svallfors, 2013). Countries in Europe, and therefore also public opinion in these countries, have experiences with huge differences with regard to the structure of redistribution policies (Guillaud, 2013). Following the logic of the impact of welfare regimes on public opinion, the conclusion has to be that there will be a level of institutional inertia that is hard to overcome. Adding a new layer on top of these existing institutional structures will inevitably lead to the question what kind of framework has to be implemented, as clearly countries do not agree on the specific characteristics of welfare state regimes that should be developed.

The regime hypothesis, however, also implies that institutions do play an important role in this regard. Citizens show a tendency to interiorize and support the norms that are being applied by the institutions that are responsible for implementing social policy. Hetherington (2005) has shown that support for redistribution policies in the United States does not just depend on levels of interpersonal solidarity, but also on trust in the political institutions that will have to implement redistribution policies. Even citizens who do support solidarity as an abstract principle, will be less inclined to spend scarce resource into redistribution, if they have the feeling that the institutions that have to implement these policies will do so in a responsive and effective manner. Trust in both national and European institutions should thus help us to explain a preference to transfer redistributive policies from the national to the European level. Support for redistribution can find its origins both in interpersonal solidarity, as in belief in the legitimacy of the institutions that will implement this redistribution.

3. HYPOTHESES

Applying the welfare regime hypothesis to the question whether there is public support for a European Social Union, or more broadly for redistribution at the European level, therefore leads to a number of contrasting expectations. On the one hand, it can be assumed that national welfare regimes will continue to have an effect on public opinion in the various member countries, and these persistent cross-national differences will render it more difficult to achieve a European consensus on the way such a European redistribution scheme could be implemented. On the other hand, it can be expected that the willingness to support redistribution is not just dependent on identification with other fellow-Europeans, and we know from previous research that European identity is only weakly developed in most European member states (Verhaegen, Hooghe & Meeusen, 2013). The institutional perspective rather leads to the expectation that if citizens perceive the EU institutions as a viable setting for redistribution policies, they will also be inclined to support the policies that will be developed at that level.

We thus expect a positive effect of European political trust on support for social redistribution on the EU level. Also, a negative relationship is expected between national political trust and support for social redistribution on the EU level as respondents with low trust in their national political institutions are expected to compensate for this by diverting their expectations for social redistribution to a different level, for instance the EU level. Respondents with high trust in national political institutions are not expected to divert to the EU level. Trust in the EU political institutions therefore is expected to be a stronger predictor for redistribution policies at the European level than the feeling of a European identity.

4. DATA

The data used in this study are derived from a recent survey wave of Eurobarometer: Eurobarometer 75.3 (2011). This specific dataset is selected as it includes the necessary information to test the factors driving support for social redistribution on the European level. Eurobarometer 75.3 contains data on all 27 EU member states the EU consisted of in 2011. About 1,000 respondents were interviewed in May 2011 in each member state. A total of 26,713 respondents are included in the dataset. Respondents were selected using a multi-stage random probability sample and were face-to-face interviewed. By using multilevel analyses, we take the structure of the data into account (individuals are nested in member states) and we can control for country level indicators which could explain differences in preferences for or against social redistribution at the EU level, as expected by the regime hypothesis. Additional information to construct the country level variables is collected from Eurostat (GDP per capita and national social expenditures).

5. OPERATIONALIZATION

In this section the used variables are presented. We explain why they are included in the analysis and how they are measured. Descriptive statistics for all variables can be found in Appendix I.

A. DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Support for redistribution on the EU level is the dependent variable in our study. This is measured in Eurobarometer 75.3 with the question: “On which of the following would you like the EU budget to be spent?”. Respondents were asked on what the EU budget should be spent firstly and secondly. One of the response options was ‘Social affairs and employment’, which are typical examples of social policy. We coded the dependent variable into three categories: social affairs and employment not mentioned (code 0), social affairs and employment mentioned secondly (code 1) and social affairs and employment mentioned firstly (code 2). The higher the score, the more support the respondent has for social redistribution on the EU level. As there are only three points on this scale, but as they can be ordered from weak to strong support for social redistribution, we will use ordered logistic multilevel analyses.

B. EXPLANATORY VARIABLES

To test the relationship between self-interest (the insurance logic) and support for social distribution, we include the perceived financial situation of the respondent. This is measured by the perception of the current economic situation of the household of the respondent. Responses range on a 4-point Likert scale. Respondents were asked: “How would you judge the current situation in each of the following? The financial situation of your household”. Responses range from ‘very bad’ (code 1) to ‘very good’ (code 4). A measure for perceived financial situation of the household is used as previous research has shown that perceptions one’s financial situation are a better explanation for the attitudes of citizens than measures of the actual financial situation of an individual (Hooghe & Marks, 2005; Loveless & Rohrschneider, 2011). According to the insurance logic, citizens base their preferences for social redistribution on an assessment of their own financial situation. The more positive they perceive their own financial situation, the less in favour they are of social redistribution. However, this assessment might be erroneous, so we use a measure of perceived financial situation to take this inconsistency into account.

The theory of self-interest, however, also leaves room for solidarity, as explained in the theoretical section. Yet, an important restriction to this solidarity is the expectation that it is limited to the in-group. It is thus expected that citizens who have a stronger feeling of a ‘European in-group’ will be more in favour of social redistribution on the EU level. In other words, citizens with a stronger European identity are expected to be more supportive of European social redistribution. Strength of European identity is in Eurobarometer 75.3 measured with the following survey item: “For each of the following statements, please tell me to what extent it corresponds or not to your own opinion. You feel you are a citizen of the EU”. The response options to this question ranged on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from ‘no, definitely not’ (code 1) to ‘yes, definitely’ (code 4).

In contrast to the hypothesis that support for redistribution depends on whether it is organized for the in-group identified with, is the idea that citizens’ trust in the institutions who organize this redistribution is crucial. Accordingly, a measurement is included for both national and European political trust as citizens are expected to more easily accept social redistribution when they trust the institutions that organize this redistribution. A positive effect of European political trust on support

for social redistribution on the EU level is expected. Also, a negative relationship is expected between national political trust and support for social redistribution on the EU level as respondents with low trust in their national political institutions are expected to compensate for this by diverting their expectations for social redistribution to a different level, for instance the EU level. Respondents with high trust in national political institutions are not expected to divert to the EU level.

The welfare regime hypothesis assumes that the context in which an individual operates drives the strength of support for social redistribution. It is expected that citizens adapt their preferences to the social welfare regime that is already applied. While social welfare is still mainly a national competence, members of the Eurozone are already more strongly economically and financially integrated. We therefore expect that there will be broader public support for social redistribution – a form of financial integration – in these member states. A dummy distinguishing between Eurozone and non-Eurozone members is thus included in the analysis.

C. CONTROL VARIABLES

We included control variables on both the individual level and on the country level. On the individual level controls are included for ideological orientation, citizenship status, optimism about the future of the EU and a number of socio-demographic variables (educational level, age and gender). On the country level the analysis contains controls for the national social expenditures and for being part of the 'PIIGS'-group.

We control for ideological orientation because citizens might be in favour of social redistribution in general, as an ideological choice, rather than because of self-interest. We expect citizens who place themselves more left on the socio-economic left-right scale to be more supportive of redistribution on the EU level. This is measured on a 12-point scale in Eurobarometer 75.3. The higher the score on this scale, the more left the respondents place themselves.

We control for citizenship status as this is expected to be related with European identity, so with the feeling to be part of the in-group (Agirdag, Huyst & Van Houtte, 2012). The data allow us to distinguish between natives and non-nationals, based on the nationality respondents have.

Optimism about the future of the EU is included in the analysis as controlling for it allows us to see the effect of having the specific attitude of having more or less trust in the EU institutions, regardless of a generally positive (or negative) attitude about the EU. Also, we expect that optimism about the future of the EU will be negatively related to support for social redistribution on the EU level, as optimist citizens might think that budgetary investments in social affairs and employment are not needed.

Educational level was measured by asking respondents when they ended their full time education. Based on this information categories were constructed indicating whether the respondent ended his/her full time education before the age of 15, between the age of 16 and 19 years old, after the age of 20, whether the respondent is still a student or whether the respondent never had full time education. As the most common category is to study until 16 to 19 years old (43 per cent of the respondents studied until this age), this category is selected as the reference category.

As a control for the welfare regime theory, the social expenditures which are already taking place in each member state are taken into account. In member states with high social expenditures respondents might be less in favour of EU social redistribution because they have internalized the idea that social redistribution is organized in a well-developed way on the country level. The social expenditures are calculated in purchasing power standards per capita in 2011 (Eurostat, 2014).

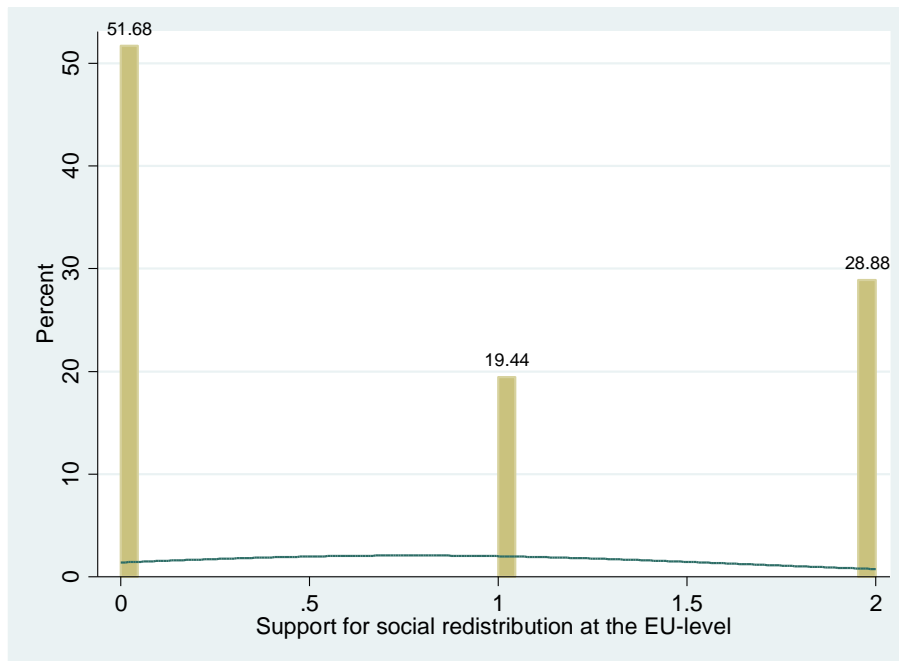
Finally, as the survey took place during the euro crisis, we included a dummy variable on the country level that distinguishes between the member states that were most severely struck by this crisis (also known as the 'PIIGS'-countries). Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain were therefore attributed code 1, the other member states were attributed code 0. We expect that citizens in countries facing economic problems will be more in favour of redistribution on the EU level because this would most likely mean that they would receive funding. Supporting EU level redistribution would thus be favoured because of self-interest at the national level.

6. ANALYSIS

A. DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

Before we investigate support for social redistribution on the EU level, it is useful to have a look at the absolute figures. At the EU level, respondents were asked to choose two policy domains from a list of 16 options on which they think the EU should spend its budget. As this is a very broad list of choices, it is quite remarkable that half of the respondents picked social affairs and employment as either the first or the second choice (see Figure 1). This topic is even the most popular one among respondents compared to all other options. Both for their first and second choice about what the EU budget should be spent on, the highest proportion of respondents chose social affairs and employment.

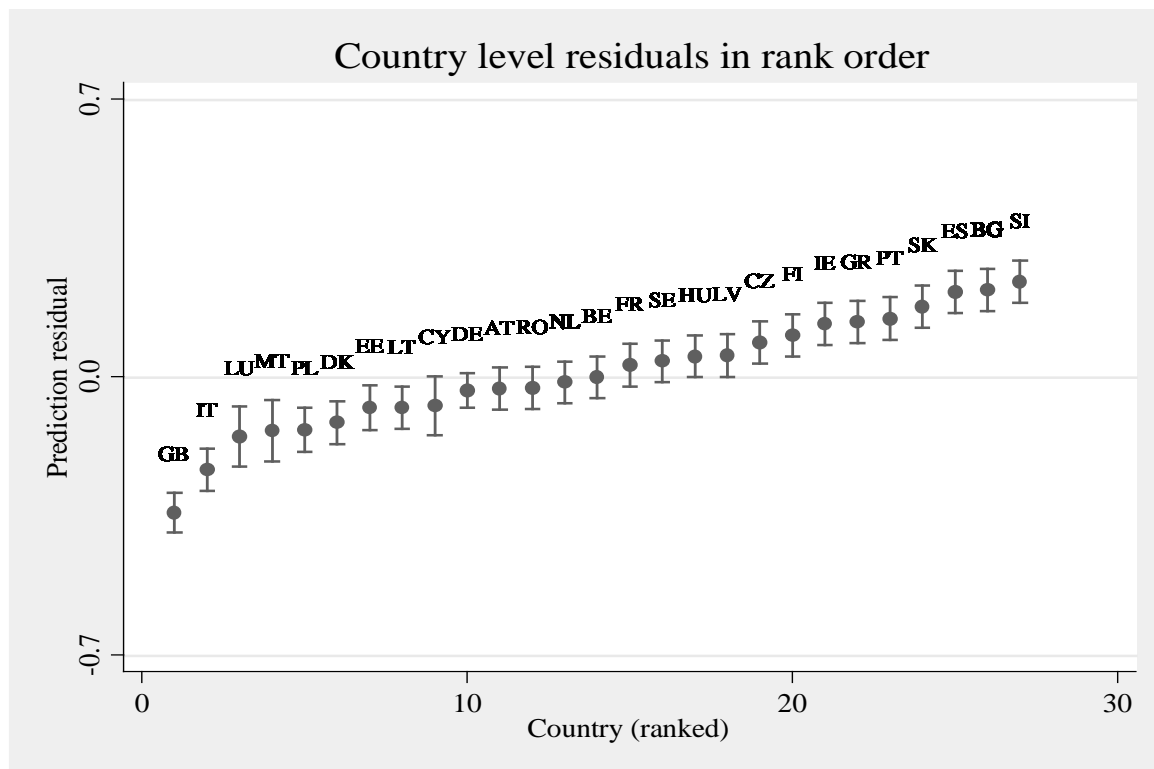
Figure 1. Distribution support for social redistribution on the EU level



Source: Eurobarometer 75.3

Figure 2 shows that significant country differences exist in support for social redistribution on the EU level. The strongest support can be found in Slovenia, Bulgaria and Spain; the weakest support is found in the UK. It has to be noted that we find high levels of support for European social redistribution in countries with a high level of income inequality, which would lead to the conclusion that in countries with a more egalitarian income structure, inhabitants are less likely to feel a pressing need to further reduce this inequality. Additionally, not only the clustered sampling of the respondents, but the accordingly clustered levels of support for European social redistribution as well show that it is important to take the multilevel structure of the data into account.

Figure 2. Support for social redistribution on the EU level, by country



Source: Eurobarometer 75.3

B. EXPLANATORY ANALYSIS

Following this presentation of the absolute levels of support for European social redistribution in each member state, multivariate multilevel analyses are carried out in order to test which factors can explain different levels in support for social redistribution on the EU level.

The models presented in Table 1 are proportional odds models, assuming that each category of the dependent variable has a different intercept (the thresholds in Table 1), but that the effect of each independent variable (the regression coefficient) is the same for every category. As the model is a cumulative ordered regression model, the odds ratios indicate the odds that a respondent is found in the highest category of support for European social redistribution, compared to being in a lower category.

As can be seen from the null model (Table 1), there is 6.3 per cent of variance between member states in support for social redistribution. This indicates that 6.3 per cent of the difference in support for European social redistribution can be attributed to country-specific factors. While we can distinguish significantly different levels of support for European social redistribution between member states (Figure 2), the variance indicates that this difference is rather limited. This should not come as a surprise, however, because in this analysis, all opinions refer to exactly the same European institutions. This obviously has an effect on the homogeneity of answers within Europe.

In Model II, the relationship between the explanatory variables and support for European social redistribution is presented. First, we find support for the idea that preferences about social redistribution are driven by self-interest: respondents that have a more positive perception of the financial situation of their household are significantly less supportive of European social redistribution ($B = -0.086$, odds ratio = 0.918, $p < 0.001$). For a one unit increase in perceived financial situation of the household, the odds of the highest category of support for European social redistribution versus the lower categories are 0.082 times smaller, given that the other variables in the model are held constant. Because of the proportional odds assumption, the same decrease (0.082 times) is found between the middle category and the lowest category of support for European social redistribution. This confirms previous findings that especially those who stand to gain from redistribution schemes will be in favour of their implementation, while the reverse holds for actors that are less likely to ever benefit themselves of redistribution schemes. We find opposite results, however, for the hypothesis that citizens are more easily willing to accept social redistribution within the in-group, as we find a significantly negative coefficient for European identity. Respondents who identify more strongly with the European Union are in effect less likely to support redistribution at the European level. These findings (which remain stable when the control variables are included in Model III) hint at the conclusion that support for a European Social Union could not be based on interpersonal solidarity. Even among those who identify as Europeans, there is apparently little willingness to support redistribution towards fellow European citizens. More specifically, in Model II, for a one unit increase in European identity, the odds that the respondent is in the highest category of support for European social redistribution versus a lower category of support is 0.068 times smaller, given that the other variables in the model are held constant.

Second, we find a significantly negative relationship between trust in national political institutions and support for European social redistribution. When a respondent trusts the national political institutions, the odds are 0.063 times smaller (in Model III) to be in the highest category of support for European social redistribution than to be in a lower category. This is in line with the expectation that citizens rather look at political institutions for the organization of social redistribution, than at individual fellow citizens. Put differently, citizens who do not trust their national institutions much tend to divert their expectations to the European level. This can also be seen in the relationship between trust in European political institutions and support for redistribution on the EU level. After including the controls in Model III², this relationship is significantly positive, which confirms the expectation that respondents who trust the EU institutions to function in an appropriate manner are also more likely to invest in this level and are willing to pass new competences to it. When a

² This analysis clearly shows that it is important to include the necessary controls in the analysis. In Model II we did not find a significant relationship for European political trust as the control for optimism about the future of the EU was not included yet. Optimism in the future of the EU is a covariate which is positively correlated with European political trust, but negatively correlated with support for European social redistribution. The relationship between European political trust and support for European social redistribution is thus mitigated by this covariate. By controlling for optimism about the future of the EU, the relationship between European political trust and support for European social redistribution gets clearer.

respondent trusts the EU institutions, the odds of the highest category of support for European social redistribution versus the lower categories are 1.100 times greater.

Third, the significantly positive relationship in Model III ($B=0.245$, $p<0.001$) between being a member of the Eurozone and supporting social redistribution on the EU level hints at the welfare regime hypothesis to be useful when studying the European integration project. Eurozone members are more strongly integrated in the EU in a financial way. As spending the EU-budget on social issues is a matter of financial integration as well, we indeed expected that citizens in Eurozone member states would be more supportive of social redistribution within the EU. This is shown in the results by the odds that are 1.278 times greater to be in the highest category of support for European social redistribution versus the lower categories for a respondent that lives in a Eurozone country. It thus makes a substantive difference whether the respondent lives inside or outside the Eurozone.

Finally, for the control variables, we find that respondents who are more optimistic about the future of the EU are significantly less supportive of European social redistribution. They might not find it necessary to invest in this policy area because they expect things to turn out well anyway. Likewise, a negative effect is found from the current level of national social expenditures. Support for 'further' social redistribution, therefore, seems to be depending partly on the current level of social expenditures. Leftist and female respondents, to the contrary, are more supportive of social redistribution on the EU level. No significant correlation is found for living in a 'PIIGS' country. Respondents that live in one of the EU member states that are most severely hit by the euro crisis are not more likely to be in favour of social redistribution.

Table 1. Modelling support for social redistribution on the EU level

	Model I Null model	Model II Support for European social redistribution	Model III Model with controls		
		B	Odds ratio	B	Odds ratio
<i>Individual mechanisms of solidarity and insurance</i>					
Perceived financial situation household		-0.086***	0.918	-0.061**	0.941
European identity		-0.070***	0.932	-0.040*	0.961
National political trust		-0.095**	0.909	-0.065*	0.937
EU political trust		0.037	1.038	0.095**	1.100
<i>Welfare regime hypothesis</i>					
Eurozone member		0.129**	1.138	0.245***	1.278
<i>Individual level control variables</i>					
Optimism future EU				-0.121***	0.886
Left ideology				0.017***	1.017
Citizenship status (native is ref.)					
Non-national				0.033	1.034
Age				-0.002**	1.000
Gender (male is ref.)				0.160***	1.174
Education (ref. is studied until 16 to 19 years old)					
Until 15 years old				0.015	1.015
Over 20 years old				-0.002	0.998
Still in education				-0.346***	0.708
No full time education				0.144	1.155
<i>Country level control variables</i>					
National social expenditures				-0.005***	0.995
PIIGS country				-0.061	0.941
<i>Threshold</i>					
Intercept 1	0.040	-0.331***		-0.557***	
Intercept 2	0.874***	0.506***		0.283*	
Log likelihood	-21303.237	-21263.216		-21202.242	
Variance (country level)	0.063**	0.054**		0.072**	

Source: Eurobarometer 75.3 (2011).

Notes: Regression coefficients and odds ratios of cumulative ordered logistic multilevel regression analyses using GLLAMM are presented. N(individual level)= 21,223. N(country level)=27. ***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05. Bivariate correlation tests and VIF statistics indicated that there are no problems of multicollinearity.

7. DISCUSSION

The goal of the current study was to investigate the determinants of support for redistribution policies at the EU level. In this regard, we mainly followed an institutional logic, leading to the assumption that the way in which these redistribution policies are organized, also has a strong impact on public opinion.

In this study, we do not wish to argue about the incentives actors receive to invest resources in social protection across Europe. Indeed, Vandenbroucke and Vanhercke (2014, 51) claim that an important incentive might be that a stronger European Social Union is a prerequisite to ensure the long-term stability of the entire Eurozone, which will have a positive effect on the economic development levels of all citizens of the Eurozone. It has to be observed, however, that this reciprocity mechanism does not operate at the individual level, but on the aggregate level. For the inhabitant of one of the richer EU member states the incentive to invest is not the hypothetical possibility that, one day, an inhabitant of the poorer EU countries will pay for her/his pension or social security scheme. The odds that such an event will occur in the foreseeable future are indeed very limited, given the strong economic divergences between the member states. Rather, the insight has to be that the state of the economy of the richer EU member states too will be affected by an economic downturn in one of the poorer EU states. In that case, a European social union is not founded on interpersonal solidarity or reciprocity, but rather on a realization of the high level of interdependency between European economies.

At first sight, such an aggregate reciprocity mechanism might seem an unlikely foundation for a program for more social redistribution within Europe. Such a foundation might seem rather abstract, for citizens who are not familiar with economic policies, European rules and basic knowledge about economic cycles. But on the other hand, the entire literature on regime effects on support for redistribution is equally abstract. This literature suggests that willingness to invest in social security schemes on a national level, is not dependent on an assessment of the morality of individual recipients of social security efforts. From an institutionalist perspective, it can be argued that this support is based on an expectation about how the institutions will behave in the future, and what are the benefits the actor will receive from these institutions and the policies they embody (Brooks & Manza, 2007). In a similar vein, on a European level too, these institutions might have a similar effect. If European citizens are convinced that the European political, monetary and social framework has tangible benefits for their own level of well-being, gradually support might develop to add a stronger social dimension to the European institutional framework. An advantage of such a scheme is also that it does not respond to a zero-sum logic. Placing the emphasis on social exchange between the richer and the poorer EU member states inevitably means that every euro that is transferred from rich to poor, is lost for those rich countries, while the odds are rather small that the transfer will be reversed in the near future. Developing a European social architecture, however, implies that this jumping scales has beneficiary effects on all European economies, and this leads to the development of a win-win situation. Framed this way, inhabitants of the rich EU member states no longer should have the feeling that they are asked to make a 'sacrifice' for the poorer EU countries.

Vandenbroucke and Vanhercke (2014, 61) note that a stronger social dimension of the European Union can be based both on solidarity and mutual insurance, and most likely “a mixture of both”. The solidarity mechanism “implies a propensity to cooperate and share with others similarly disposed, even at personal cost”. The current analysis suggests that this interpersonal solidarity mechanism currently is only weakly developed within Europe. Not only is the sense of a European identity not all that wide-spread, but we have even seen that identifying as a European might have a negative impact on the willingness to support redistribution at the European level. To put it differently: it would be wrong to expect that if Europeans gradually identify to a larger extent as European, this will automatically lead to the establishment of interpersonal ties of solidarity across the European continent.

This does not imply, however, that the proposal for a European Social Union as such should be dismissed. It does imply that the insurance element of the proposal, especially at the aggregate level, will need to be emphasized in order to strengthen the public legitimacy of this proposal. From a functionalist perspective, this is a likely development. The European monetary union is a well-established fact, and its functioning and stability could and should have an effect on public opinion that is more than eager to preserve the economic benefits of this governance scheme. In a way this reverses the policy logic. To some extent, there indeed has to be a shared concept of European citizenship and group identity in order to achieve a European Social Union. But trust in the institutions of the European Union in this regard is most likely more important. If citizens have the conviction that the EU institutions function in an effective and trustworthy manner, this does increase their willingness to transfer new policy domains to these European institutions. From an institutionalist perspective, we can argue that what matters most is trust in the institutions, and to a lesser extent, trust in each and every one of one’s fellow citizens.

This logic implies that a European Social Union should not just be seen as an individual mechanism of solidarity. If we focus on individuals, the insurance element is rendered very unlikely. Redistribution implies that resources will be transferred from the archetypical Swedish dentist to the retired Greek worker. The likelihood that this individual solidarity will ever be reversed is almost zero, given the huge differences with regard to economic development levels within the EU. The focus therefore has to be at the aggregate and institutional level. A more prosperous and cohesive European Union has important economic benefits, also for our Swedish dentist. Defined in this manner, a European Social Union can be conceptualized as a common good, with benefits flowing to all members, whether or not they as an individual receive resources from the system. As such, we can relate to a long line of studies on the sustainability of common goods (Ostrom, 2005). Governing the commons does not require a high level of trust in each and every individual that might benefit from joining these common pools of resources. But it does require a high level of trust in the effectiveness of the institutions that will govern these commons and this is most likely the main challenge for the European institutions as they currently function. The European institutions have been faced with an enormous challenge in their struggle to uphold the levels of prosperity of European citizens. These efforts have not always been successful, and this has further eroded the legitimacy of the European Union, as became apparent during the European elections of May 2014. But simultaneously the EU needs higher levels of legitimacy, if it wants to play its role and protect the European social model. The long-term answer to the prevailing climate of Euroscepticism is not less Europe, but more and more effective Europe.

8. REFERENCES

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9. APPENDIX: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS USED VARIABLES

Variable	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Perceived financial situation household	2.630	1	4
National political trust	0.378	0	1
EU political trust	0.520	0	1
European identity	2.742	1	4
Optimism future EU	2.621	1	4
Age	48.534	15	98
Left ideology	6.347	1	12
National social expenditures (per capita in PPS)	6306	1602	13275
Proportion			
Support for social redistribution on the EU level			
No support	49.55%		
Secondly	18.64%		
Firstly	27.69%		
Gender			
Male	45.96%		
Female	54.04%		
Citizenship status			
Native	97.72%		
Non-national	2.28%		
Education			
Until 15 years old	17.59%		
Until 16 to 19 years old	43.52%		
Over 20 years old	30.57%		
Still in education	7.90%		
No full time education	0.41%		
Eurozone member	60.85% is member		
PIIGS country	19.14% is member		

Source: Eurobarometer 75.3 (2011).